

Charter Schools

New Zealand was the first country in the world to introduce Charter Schools. Every school in New Zealand is a Charter School. They're great! Kiwi Charter Schools operate within a high quality, high achieving public education system where every child, irrespective of ethnicity, religion, social status, ability or disability has the right to a free, secular and compulsory education at their local school because Kiwis believe every child equally deserves that right. To fulfil this promise, professionals have also developed a world class curriculum based on our NZ Curriculum with additional input from local communities to add flavour and give voice to those communities. The curriculum is sufficiently broad to enable all children an access point to learning regardless of their individual motivations.

Our Charter Schools emerged from the 1980s *Tomorrow's Schools'* educational reforms. Regional Education Boards were disestablished and communities were empowered to take control of their local schools, governed by a Board of Trustees. Schools became self-managing. The Charter document became the accountability link between the Ministry of Education and the new Board of Trustees. Under this system Kiwi schools have flourished and in achievement, now rank right up amongst the very best in the OECD world. Alongside other top ranked countries, we do not sit complacently. Like them, we still have 14% of children who require even more help than our curriculum can offer and we want those children to be part of our Kiwi success stories too.

The first Charter Schools to surface in the United States of America did not follow our model. They were very differently motivated. They follow a neoliberal philosophy which is about government divesting itself of public responsibilities on the premise that the market knows best. American Charter Schools are not about providing free public education in any fair and equitable way to the American children. They are about government relieving itself of the responsibility for the social ills of American society and passing those problems on to the education sector. They are about distancing government from the responsibility to fully fund public education and to privatise. They are about closing down public education and replacing it with public private partnerships (PPPs), shifting the responsibility of educating young Americans more and more on to the private sector. Indeed there are chains of charter schools in the USA headed by corporates, and intended to be profit making. The precursor to setting up charter schools was installing an assessment culture in schools so that government could identify those schools they deemed 'underperforming'. Such schools could be closed down and replaced with charter schools. The notion of charter schools has severely weakened the idea of public education for all and made private schooling normal. In the end that is the goal of charter schools. To normalise privatisation. And the overall result? Well, what we do know is that the USA is steadily dropping down the OECD education achievement ladder and a 2009 review indicated that overall, charter schools perform more poorly than public schools. The other outstanding feature is charter schools in America emphasise social divisions. There are the winner schools and the losers.

Here in New Zealand we have our own unique version of charter schools which puts quality public education and the achievement of children first. Our charter schools give power and control to our communities and they are successful. We stand to lose all of that if the New Zealand Government goes down the track of Americanising, privatising and corporatizing our excellent system which is the envy of our overseas colleagues. Kiwis are not Americans. New Zealand is not the USA. We are proud to do things the Kiwi way. We don't need to import American models and emulate them. We already have our own unique version and it's the only version Kiwis want.

Paul Drummond
President